THE QUESTION

# What did the early Christians say the firmament is made of?

*Asked by a THF member on April 12, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 23 early Christian passages and 93 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.*

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-christians-say-the-firmament-is-made-of

## The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

These passages do not settle what material the firmament is made of. Scripture and the early writers describe it as the heaven God made to divide the waters, spread over the world like a roof or arch, with the sun, moon and stars set in it. Lactantius openly says he does not know what the heaven is made of.

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POINT 1 OF 5

## God made the firmament to divide the waters

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Hippolytus repeats the words of Genesis: God made the firmament and set it between the waters below and the waters above. Tertullian adds that this firmament is the same heaven God created in the beginning, now set in order.

**1** "And God made the firmament. And God divided the water under the firmament from the water above the firmament. And it was so."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

**2** "Then it goes on to present its arrangement: how God separated the water below the firmament from the water above the firmament, in Genesis 1:7, and called the firmament heaven, which was the very thing He had created in the beginning."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Hermogenes* 26 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

POINT 2 OF 5

## Lactantius admits he does not know its material

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Lactantius mentions the ideas that heaven is brass, crystal, or frozen air, and says he does not have to accept any of them just because he cannot say what heaven is made of. Arnobius uses the same kind of reasoning about the earth: we can reject a wrong claim without knowing the true material.

**3** "If anyone should say to me that the heaven is made of brass, or crystal, or, as Empedocles says, that it is frozen air, must I immediately agree because I do not know what material the heaven is made of?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *On the Workmanship of God* 17 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 23, page 6** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

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**4** “Also, we think it is no disgrace to be ignorant of what we have never seen.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Arnobius,** *Against the Heathen* 3 (c. 290–330 AD) **Source 22, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 3 OF 5

## Heaven is pictured as a roof over creation

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Theophilus compares heaven to a roof that God made first, and says it covered the waters and the earth like a lid. He describes it as a dome-shaped covering, which speaks of its shape, not its material.

**5** “Therefore the prophet also said that the creation of the heavens happened first of all, like a kind of roof, saying, "In the beginning God created the heavens."”

*later in the same passage*

“And he speaks of "darkness" because the heaven that God made covered the waters and the earth like a lid.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 13 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 4 OF 5

## The church prayed of heaven as an arch

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

A prayer in the Apostolic Constitutions thanks God for dividing the waters by a firmament. It pictures heaven fixed like an arch over us and made bright with stars, and the firmament set in the midst of the deep.

**6** “You divided the waters from the waters by a firmament, and put in them a spirit of life.”

*later in the same passage*

“The heaven is fixed like an arch over us and made glorious with stars for our comfort in the darkness.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 20, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

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POINT 5 OF 5

## The heavenly lights are placed in the firmament

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Origen says that everything in the firmament, which Scripture calls heaven and where the lights are placed, was made through Christ. For him the firmament and all it holds are created things, not something eternal.

**7**

> "Now, when it is said that all things were made by Him, and that in Him all things were created, both things in heaven and things on earth, there can be no doubt that this also includes the things in the firmament, which is called heaven, and in which those lights are said to be placed."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 7 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 12, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

THE LIMITS

## What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not settle what substance the firmament is made of.
- They do not explain how the waters above the firmament are held up or what they are like.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

## The Sources

The 23 early Christian passages and 93 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–23, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 24–85, in Bible order), then 31 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

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## EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *23 passages from 12 writers*

### **Justin Martyr**, *c. 130–165 AD · source 1*

**1** *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* “according to a pre-existing form. Similarly, he thought the created heaven, which he called the firmament, was what our senses perceive, whereas the heaven the mind perceives is what… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Theophilus of Antioch**, *c. 169–183 AD · sources 2–4*

**2** *To Autolycus* 13 **Quote 5, page 3** “very beginning of the history and origin of the world, Holy Scripture did not speak about this firmament that we see, but about another heaven, which is invisible to us… [continues online] **read ›**

**3** *To Autolycus* 11 (on point 1) “God called the firmament Heaven, and God saw that it was good… [continues online] **read ›**

**4** *To Autolycus* 15 (1885 English; on point 5) the sun is a type of God, and the moon of man… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Tertullian**, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 5–6*

**5** *Against Hermogenes* 26 **Quote 2, page 2** “Genesis 1:1. Then it goes on to present its arrangement: how God separated the water below the firmament from the water above the firmament, in Genesis 1:7, and… [continues online] **read ›**

**6** *Against Hermogenes* 31 (on point 1) “the appurtenances of the heaven and the earth, made then in the beginning, were the darkness and the deep, and the spirit, and the waters… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Early Liturgies**, *c. 200–400 AD · source 7*

**7** *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (1885 English; on point 2) “has made the heaven out of waters, and adorned it with choirs of stars… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Hippolytus**, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 8–9*

**8** *Refutation of All Heresies* 28 (1885 English; on point 3) “infinite chaos, nor measureless water, nor solid earth, nor dense air, not warm fire, nor refined spirit, nor the azure canopy of the stupendous firmament… [continues online] **read ›**

**9** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 **Quote 1, page 2** “let it divide the water from the water. And it was so. And God made the firmament. And God divided the water under the firmament from the water above the… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Origen**, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 10–13*

**10** *Against Celsus* 49 (1885 English; on point 1) “what the light which was created, and what the firmament, as distinct from the heaven which was created in the beginning… [continues online] **read ›**

**11** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 3 (on point 1) “another heaven and another earth are shown to exist besides that firmament which is said to have been made after the second day, or… [continues online] **read ›**

**12** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 7 **Quote 7, page 4** “Now, when it is said that all things were made by Him… [continues online] **read ›**

**13** *Commentary on John* 1 (1885 English; on point 2) “the same way the heavens were founded (made solid) by the Word of God, for they are of a more divine substance, which on this account is called solid… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Dionysius of Alexandria**, *c. 232–265 AD · sources 14–15*

**14** *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 (1885 English) “others have reduced themselves into the circular figure, so as to impart a certain solidity to the ether, and arch it over, and constitute it a vast graduated ascent of… [continues online] **read ›**

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**15** *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 did hear, and to which he testified when he said, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.” And surely he never looked down on… [continues online] **read ›**

**Julius Africanus**, *c. 232–265 AD · source 16*

**16** *Extant Writings* 1 (on point 3) “this artificer who is born, the son of the chief artificer, framed by his excellent skill the roof of the third heavens, and established by his word this lower world… [continues online] **read ›**

**Novatian**, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 17–19*

**17** *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 8 (on point 3) “His works, while the living creatures that hold rule over the rest are subjected to His throne. A crystal covering is spread over all things. That is, heaven covers all… [continues online] **read ›**

**18** *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 1 punishment, an immortality of guilt. Nevertheless, in the higher regions, that is, above even the firmament itself, in regions that cannot now be seen by our eyes, He had already… [continues online] **read ›**

**19** *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 17 that both John and the others received from him what they say. For if John says, "All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made," the prophet… [continues online] **read ›**

**Apostolic Constitutions**, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 20–21*

**20** *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 6, page 3** “One was called Night, and the other Day… [continues online] **read ›**

**21** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 4) “heaven knows Him who fixed it as a cube of stone, in the form of an arch, upon nothing, who united the land and water to one another, and scattered… [continues online] **read ›**

**Arnobius**, *c. 290–330 AD · source 22*

**22** *Against the Heathen* 3 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “as, if the earth be said to be of glass, silver, iron, or gathered together and made from brittle clay, we cannot hesitate to maintain that this is untrue, although… [continues online] **read ›**

**Lactantius**, *c. 290–320 AD · source 23*

**23** *On the Workmanship of God* 17 **Quote 3, page 2** “understand what cannot be true. If anyone should say to me that the heaven is made of brass, or crystal, or, as Empedocles says, that it is frozen air, must… [continues online] **read ›**

**THE BIBLE** *62 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

**24** **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. **read ›**

**25** **Genesis 1:2** But the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was over the abyss, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. **read ›**

**26** **Genesis 1:6** Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water, and let it divide between water and water.” And it was so. **read ›**

**27** **Genesis 1:7** God made the firmament, and God divided between the water that was under the firmament and the water that was above the firmament. **read ›**

**28** **Genesis 1:8** God called the firmament Heaven, and God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. **read ›**

**29** **Genesis 1:14** Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to give light on the earth, to divide between the day and the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, for days and for years. **read ›**

**30** **Genesis 1:15** Let them be for light in the firmament of heaven, to shine on the earth.” And it was so. **read ›**

**31** **Genesis 1:17** God set them in the firmament of heaven to shine on the earth, **read ›**

**32** **Genesis 1:20** Then God said, “Let the waters bring forth creeping things that are living creatures, and birds flying above the earth in the firmament of heaven.” And it was so. **read ›**

**33** **Genesis 2:4** This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth, when they came to be, in the day that the Lord God made the heaven and the earth, **read ›**

**34** **Exodus 27:19** All the furnishings and all the tools and the pegs of the court shall be of bronze. **read ›**

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35 **Leviticus 26:19** I will break the arrogance of your pride, and I will make your sky iron for you and your land like bronze. **read ›**

36 **Deuteronomy 28:23** And the sky over your head shall be bronze to you, and the earth under you iron. **read ›**

37 **1 Kings 7:6** And the porch of the pillars was fifty cubits long and fifty wide, with a porch joined in front of them; and pillars and a thickness in front of it for the porches. (Septuagint 3 Kingdoms 7:43 (1 Kings 7:6 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

38 **Job 37:18** Will you make firm with him the ancient things, strong as the appearance of molten metal? **read ›**

39 **Psalms 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands. (Septuagint Psalm 18:2 (Psalm 19:1 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

40 **Psalms 104:2** wrapping yourself in light as in a garment, stretching out the heaven like a skin. (Septuagint Psalm 103:2 (Psalm 104:2 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

41 **Psalms 148:4** Praise him, you heavens of heavens, and the water that is above the heavens. **read ›**

42 **Proverbs 8:28** and when he made strong the clouds above, and when he made secure the springs of the earth under heaven, **read ›**

43 **Jeremiah 18:2** Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there you will hear my words. **read ›**

44 **Jeremiah 32:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **Lamentations 1:2** Beth. Weeping, she has wept in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; and there is none to comfort her among all her lovers; all her friends have dealt faithlessly with her; they have become her enemies. **read ›**

46 **Ezekiel 1:22** And the likeness over the heads of the living creatures was like a firmament, like the appearance of crystal, spread out over their wings above. **read ›**

47 **Ezekiel 1:26** that was over their head, like the appearance of a sapphire stone, the likeness of a throne upon it; and upon the likeness of the throne, a likeness as of the appearance of a man above. **read ›**

48 **Ezekiel 10:1** And I looked, and behold, above the firmament that was over the head of the cherubim there was something like a sapphire stone, the likeness of a throne above them. **read ›**

49 **Ezekiel 37:18** And it shall be, when the children of your people say to you, “Will you not tell us what these things mean to you?” **read ›**

50 **1 Esdras 8:57** and twenty golden vessels, and twelve vessels of bronze, of fine bronze, gleaming like gold. **read ›**

51 **1 Esdras 9:38** And the whole multitude gathered together in the open square before the gate of the temple toward the east, **read ›**

52 **Wisdom of Sirach 16:18** Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens of God, the abyss and the earth, will be shaken at his visitation; **read ›**

53 **Wisdom of Sirach 43:1** The pride of the height, a firmament of clarity, the appearance of heaven in a vision of glory. **read ›**

54 **Wisdom of Sirach 43:9** the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord. **read ›**

55 **Wisdom of Sirach 43:12** It encircles heaven with a circle of glory; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out. **read ›**

56 **Wisdom of Sirach 50:9** like fire and frankincense in the censer, like a vessel of hammered gold adorned with every precious stone, **read ›**

57 **1 Enoch 1:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **1 Enoch 14:10** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **1 Enoch 14:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **1 Enoch 14:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

61 **1 Enoch 14:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

62 **1 Enoch 14:18** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

63 **1 Enoch 18:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

64 **1 Enoch 18:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **1 Enoch 18:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **1 Enoch 18:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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67 **1 Enoch 36:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
68 **1 Enoch 36:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
69 **1 Enoch 41:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
70 **1 Enoch 60:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
71 **1 Enoch 60:21** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
72 **1 Enoch 69:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
73 **1 Enoch 71:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
74 **1 Enoch 72:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
75 **1 Enoch 77:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
76 **1 Enoch 91:16** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
77 **1 Enoch 93:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
78 **1 Enoch 93:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
79 **1 Enoch 101:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
80 **Ephesians 1:22** And he subjected all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the church, **read ›**
81 **2 Peter 3:5** For they willfully forget that there were heavens from of old, and an earth formed out of water and amid water by the word of God, **read ›**
82 **Revelation 4:3** The one seated there was like jasper and sardius in appearance, and a rainbow surrounded the throne, like emeralds in appearance. **read ›**
83 **Revelation 4:6** Before the throne was something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal. In the middle of the throne, and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. **read ›**
84 **Revelation 21:11** having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. **read ›**
85 **Revelation 21:18** The construction of its wall was jasper. The city was pure gold, like pure glass. **read ›**

## ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *31 verses, by reference*

*Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.*

**Genesis** 2:1 · 25:1
**Exodus** 20:8
**Deuteronomy** 30:14
**Psalms** 13:3
**Proverbs** 4:6
**Matthew** 10:29 · 11:27
**Luke** 18:27
**John** 1:3 · 1:14 · 4:24 · 5:17 · 5:19 · 8:23 · 8:43 · 10:8 · 15:22 · 17:3 · 17:16
**Romans** 10:6 · 11:33
**1 Corinthians** 7:31 · 15:44
**2 Corinthians** 4:18 · 5:1
**Ephesians** 4:10
**Hebrews** 4:9
**1 John** 5:19
**Revelation** 4:7 · 5:13

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*Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.*

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

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